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WHY GERMANY STRENGTHENS HER NAVY.

BY KARL BLIND.

I.

WHAT is the central fact, the leading motive in connection with the re-establishment of a German fleet?

Germany is geographically wedged in between two great military and naval Powers, which are now in close alliance. One of these, France, has for more than four hundred years made war upon Germany under royal, republican and imperial governments. These wars were undertaken, as her own historian, Henri Martin, approvingly stated, for obtaining possession of the Rhine frontier. When France was successful, she even annexed German territory beyond the Rhine. This was done as early as the time of Louis XIV. The French theory then was that the plain between the Black Forest and the right bank of the Rhine was part of France's strategical region, and that it must, therefore, come into her possession. Under Napoleon I., vassal French kingdoms and principalities were set up beyond the Rhine, and his Empire was extended to Lübeck on the Baltic. The so-called Rhenish League was pushed up to Mecklenburg and Saxony, near the Russian frontier. The whole of Germany was then simply cut into pieces.

So much for Germany's western neighbor. Of Russia it is well known that the military and bureaucratic ring which practically disposes of what is called the system of autocracy looks with an evil eye upon the new condition of Germany. The aim of that ring is still the acquisition of universal empire for Russia, both in Europe and in Asia. Hence, whatever may be its attitude for the moment, it does not easily brook the existence of any strong Power in close contiguity to the European and Asiatic dominions of the Czar. The alliance of Russia with France is the result of that

feeling and of those ambitious aspirations. They are directed against England in Asia and, eventually, against Germany.

Now look at the Muscovite Empire with its 130,000,000 inhabitants, among them many barbarous, warlike tribes. On a peace footing, Russia keeps nearly 900,000 men; on a war footing, she is reckoned to be able to raise 3,500,000, not counting the reserves. Though her commercial fleet is quite insignificant, owing to the comparatively small bulk of her trade, her navy is not far from being twice as large as that of Germany. Whilst I am writing this, Russia's annual budget of 98,318,000 rubles, as it was in 1902, is augmented in a supplementary way by 17,000,000 rubles, according to the latest report of the Finance Minister, Mr. Witte.

France, on her part, keeps nearly 600,000 men under arms. On a war-footing she can raise more than 3,000,000 men. Her navy is far larger than that of her eastern neighbor. It is larger, although Germany leads her as well as Russia as regards the merchant fleet. First in rank comes England, with her commercial fleet of 14,373,000 tons; then comes the United States of America, with upwards of 5,552,000 tons; then the German Empire, with 2,720,000 tons; then Norway and Sweden, with 2,338,000; then, only, France with 1,401,000.

Now look at the massing of Russian troops on Germany's eastern and at the massing of French troops on Germany's western frontier, where, since the war of 1870-71, France has also established a very strong iron girdle of fortresses. If I could give here the diagrams which I have before me, showing the comparative proportions of Russian, French and German troops on the two frontiers, the most confirmed antagonist of Germany would have to acknowledge that there is good reason why Germany should be on her guard.

II.

Nevertheless, all England, barring a few men of juster feeling, has recently rung with cries of alarm against what some speakers call the "big" German fleet, which is said to be a danger to England. Answering some of these alarmists in public, I said I would put it to any sensible Englishman, whether, if his country had gone through the same dread experiences as Germany, he would not take a lesson from that history. Germany has had the Thirty Years' War, when foreign armies from various parts of Europe desolated the Fatherland in bloody struggles, at the end

of which its population was found to be reduced to one-third of its former numbers. She has had the wars of Louis XIV., which turned flourishing German provinces into a howling wilderness. She has had the wars of Napoleon I., through whose insatiable ambition Germany as a nation ceased for a while politically to exist. She has had the terrible Franco-German war, when a French fleet, fortunately inefficient at that time, appeared in the German Ocean, whilst there was scarcely such a thing in existence as a German navy.

To-day both France and Russia possess large war-fleets; the former having 493 vessels with 3,739 guns; the latter, 405 vessels with 2,613 guns; together, 898 vessels with 6,352 guns; and Germany has only 281 vessels with 2,736 guns, as against those of the two Powers between which she is closed in, and by whom she may be attacked both in the German Ocean and in the Baltic, as well as on land, in a war in which she would have to defend herself upon two fronts. Is Germany, in such a state of things, to keep herself open to the gravest dangers, merely for the sake of disproving the utterly unwarranted suspicions of the greatest naval Power of the earth?

In order to show the enormous disparity between the German and British fleets, the Kaiser recently presented to the Reichstag a table or diagram showing the comparative naval strength of the two countries in battle-ships, fully-armored cruisers, and cruisers with deck-armor only. The figures were as follows:

Battle-ships—Great Britain, 35; Germany, 8.
 Armored Cruisers—Great Britain, 12; Germany, 2.
 Protected Cruisers—Great Britain, 66; Germany, 12.
 In reserve: Battle-ships—Great Britain, 7; Germany, 4.
 Armored Cruisers—Great Britain, 2; Germany, 0.
 Protected Cruisers—Great Britain, 43; Germany, 5.

TOTALS IN CLASS.

Battle-ships—Great Britain, 42; Germany, 12.
 Armored Cruisers—Great Britain, 14; Germany, 2.
 Protected Cruisers—Great Britain, 109; Germany, 17.

VESSELS BUILDING.

Battle-ships—Great Britain, 12; Germany, 6.
 Armored Cruisers—Great Britain, 20; Germany, 3.
 Protected Cruisers—Great Britain, 8; Germany, 6.

In presence of these figures, who could dream of the so-called "big" fleet of Germany being a danger to England? Evidently,

the Kaiser wanted to show the utter absurdity of such fears. But no sooner had this official statement been published than writers and speakers in England were again active with strange denunciations. It was then declared that the table and diagram in question had been drawn up, not for the purpose of allaying groundless fears, but with the scarcely veiled object of spurring on the German people to still larger naval preparations.

III.

I can speak on this subject with perfect impartiality. My opinions as to the present mode of government in Germany—in fact since the days of the overthrow of the great national movement for freedom and unity in 1848-49—are tolerably well-known, else I would not have lived the better part of my life as an exile from my native country. The second home of myself and my family has for many years been in England, and, naturally, I have England's welfare at heart. I say with perfect conviction, therefore, that the denunciations in question are as unjust as they are uncalled for, so far as Germany is concerned. If England sees fit to increase her own navy and to re-organize her army, well and good; that is her affair. Those who urge measures of that kind may point to possible or probable dangers from Russia, as Mr. Balfour, the Premier, has recently done, or from Russia's French ally, or from both. Constantinople, Afghanistan, Persia, India, Egypt, might be indicated as points of peril to a world Power which rules the fifth part of the habitable globe, and which has not a few dissatisfied populations under its dominion at home and abroad. To take due note of this condition—that is England's affair.

As to Germany, can any reasonable man expect that she should bare her breast to great perils, not looming in the distance, but most closely threatening her in the immediate neighborhood? Germans know too well, from sad experience, what the want or the decay of naval power has cost their Fatherland. Germany once had, that is to say in the north of the country, the famed Maritime League of Free Towns—the Hansa. It held sway in the German Ocean and the Baltic, and was able, nearly five hundred years ago, to send out a war-fleet of 248 ships with a crew of 12,000 men. For centuries, this flourishing League existed, bringing wealth to the nation and establishing security for the

country's coasts. Our King-Emperors, unfortunately, gave no support to the Hansa. Their thoughts were ambitiously turned toward Italy. Our lesser princelings, originally mere officials of the Empire subject to deposition, ever and anon strove during those harassing Italian struggles to undermine the power of the central authority, so as to make themselves, first, semi-sovereign and, finally, sovereign; thus tearing Germany into dynastic shreds and patches. The Hansa itself, being mainly ruled by the somewhat exclusive spirit of its patrician merchants, committed a serious fault. It drew a dividing line between northern and southern Germany, excluding from its membership the inhabitants of the latter part of the Fatherland. Its power was thus additionally weakened through narrow commercial considerations.

Chiefly owing to the want of support from the Empire and from the nation at large, the Hanseatic League gradually sank from its once distinguished position. When its strength had decayed, and Germany was distracted by the Thirty Years' War, that sucked out the very life-blood of the people, her coasts and the mouths of her great rivers became the easy prey of foreign attack. Thenceforth, thanks to dynastic policy, all security against invasion from the sea was gone.

IV.

Is it to be wondered at that, after the Napoleonic wars which had brought about the entire political disruption of Germany, the recollections of a nobler past and of later bitter experiences should have acted upon the minds of patriots, making them yearn for the restoration of naval strength and security. In the years before the revolution of 1848-49 that was the theme of Liberal and Republican leaders. It formed the burden of the enthusiastic song of poets, like Herwegh and Freiligrath, the prophetic bards of the coming national rising. In 1843, Freiligrath foresaw the black-red-gold banner (then the forbidden symbol of national unity, which was treated by our princes as a badge of high treason, for which many men had to undergo cruel imprisonment) waving from the masts of a German navy. The poet gave those ships of the future names from the circle of the celebrities, and from the history, of the Fatherland, such as "Hansa," "Luther," "Humboldt," "Goethe," "Schiller," "Arndt," and others. In the same lofty spirit, Herwegh's lays tried to rouse the nation.

We all who then strove for a united Germany in the form of a democratic commonwealth agitated, before and during the revolution we had worked for, in favor of the establishment of a German fleet. When a national parliament came together at Frankfort, the demands of Liberals and Republicans, and the dream-like prophecies of poets were to be converted into a practical fact. A beginning was made with the creation of a small navy amidst the revolutionary events of those years of storm and stress. But even then, a fact now almost forgotten, Lord Palmerston, of all men, who was called "Lord Firebrand" by those reactionists who charged him with active support of popular causes abroad, came out as a bitter antagonist of German naval attempts. He actually had the satirical impertinence to ask "what pirate flag that was" on certain vessels flying the black-red-gold colors. At Portsmouth, the mob tore that flag down from a German merchant ship, and trod it in the mud. In those days, the English ambassador at Berlin, Lord Westmoreland, acting, no doubt, upon instructions from Downing Street, played also his part as an antagonist of German freedom and unity. It was in the final stage of the revolution. The army and the people of southwestern Germany had risen in support of the constitution framed by the national parliament at Frankfort, which was threatened with dissolution by dynastic governments. Rival German princes, as jealous of each other as they were hostile to popular rights, were quarrelling among themselves as to who should be Commander-in-Chief of the Royalist armies that were to overthrow the hard-won new liberties of the nation. Then the English ambassador did his best to compose those princely jealousies, so that the bloody destruction of the cause of freedom and national unity might all the more effectually and quickly be carried out.

Shamefully enough, the small German fleet was afterwards brought under the hammer by worthless reactionary governments.

It will thus be seen that the idea of a German navy is not, as some of its enemies try to suggest, of recent Prussian, royal and imperial origin, but that it has its foundation in national necessities and in popular tradition.

V.

Years ago, long before the recent South-African war, an influential and prominent London weekly raised the cry, "*Delenda*

est Germania," simply on account of the growing commercial competition between Germany and England.

Nevertheless, the government of William II. has encountered no light difficulties in Parliament, whenever it presented its naval budget. That opposition, it is true, was to be accounted for, not by any disinclination of the population at large, but rather by the natural dissatisfaction with the illiberal procedures of the government, and the confused medley of party groups in the Reichstag.

In respect to the first point, the Emperor's government has only itself to thank. "*Regis voluntas suprema lex*" and similar utterances are not to the taste of the mass of the nation. Hence, the Social Democratic party, as an organized party, the majority of the democratic "People's Party," and even a section of the Liberal or Radical-Progressionists have often opposed the naval bills. The aristocratic Conservative and the ultramontane Centre Parties have on their part, also, given trouble—each trying to make a bargain with the government for its own special purposes.

A downright opposition, like that of the Social Democrats, might be understood if there were a chance of an early overthrow of the whole monarchical system. Such a prospect is, however, by no means in sight. The question is, therefore, simply one of national security, which every one, irrespective of party, ought to keep in mind. If a hostile attack from abroad were to occur, no doubt many of the present irreconcilable opponents of the German naval policy would have to effect a change in their attitude. But then, it must be remembered, it might be too late.

As to the feeling of the nation at large, it may be taken for certain that, if a plebiscite in the Swiss style had been or were now taken, the verdict would have been and would be now in favor of proper naval preparations against the increasing contingency of risks, even though an additional burden of taxation had to be borne. Though thirty-two years have passed since the last war with France, the lesson of that time has not been lost upon the German people. The readiness with which military and naval budgets are always voted in the French Chamber of Deputies, generally with scarcely any discussion, and the great and rapid increase of the Russian and French fleets, are for Germany significant monitory signs.

Along the North Sea and the Baltic, Germany possesses a good sea-faring population. Year by year, the number of men who

come from the south to enter the navy is steadily increasing. This is true even for Alsace-Lorraine, which now furnishes far more volunteers for the navy than might be expected, comparing its population with that of Germany as a whole. For all that, how is it possible that the greatest naval Power of the world should be alarmed by Germany? The naval budget of England for 1902-1903 is £31,255,500; the naval budget for Germany £4,345,000. The number of officers and men in the English navy is 108,000; in the German navy, 33,000.

VI.

There can be no doubt that public opinion in England has become strangely nervous, not to say hysterical, since the defeats in the early part of the South-African war. Under an apparent outward calmness, there grew up in those days an extraordinary feeling of insecurity. As the war went on, in a seemingly endless manner, the alarm became all the greater, because every nation in Europe, and, indeed, the vast majority of Americans, also, sympathized with the invaded republics.

When the war was over, Germany, strangely enough, was singled out for public denunciation. All the accumulated rage was vented upon her. Yet, throughout that war, there had been men enough in Germany who simply regretted that a kindred nation, which they had hitherto looked upon as a representative of free institutions, should be engaged in the work of destroying two free commonwealths. The best friends of England and Germany felt sad at heart at this turn of affairs. Among them were honorary members of the Cobden Club, of whom it could certainly not be alleged that they were moved by unworthy jealousy.

But what of those in England who, even many years ago, from commercial rivalry, wished to see the *Delenda est Germania* parole carried out.

It is to be hoped that the bulk of the English nation is free from such unworthy sentiment, and that the bitter antagonism to Germany is, in a large measure, the result of the intriguing attempts of a mere group of men whose suspicious manœuvres call for strong reprobation.

I allude here to some well-known persons, who, whilst egging on England against Germany, purposely serve by their writings the aggressive designs of Russia—designs fatal to the standing of England as a great Power. These men, at the same time, try to

cultivate a special friendship with Russia's ally. Their design is to drive France once more into an adventure upon the Rhine, out of which (I say it with regret, as a sympathizer with democratic institutions) the defeated republic would emerge the prey of a Dictatorship, to be followed by a return to a royal or imperial régime. With a view to creating a factitious and fictitious public opinion, some of these men are in the habit of writing both over their own signatures and also over various Latin aliases. This has been going on for a number of years. No wonder the many political innocents who are imposed upon by the anonymous game ask one another, "Must there not be a great deal of truth in the statements made against Germany, when such a number of different writers come to the same conclusion?" Yet it has recently been proved that these "different men" are in some remarkable cases a single individual, cleverly multiplying himself in this way: a man who serves the cause of Muscovite aggression in the Near East and in the Far East.

Now what a fine opportunity it would be for the military and bureaucratic ring at St. Petersburg to attempt the conquest of Constantinople, or to give trouble to England in India, by way of Afghanistan, if the two kindred Teutonic nations on the two sides of the German Ocean were to take each other by the throat!

VII.

Writers of the kind mentioned are, unfortunately, able to trade upon the strange ignorance which prevails among the masses in England in regard to foreign affairs. Sometimes they show themselves equally ignorant in the most ludicrous manner. Thus one of those who support Russian aggression recently gave, with the object of making German naval efforts look all the more criminal, the astounding geographical information that Prussia, by annexing Schleswig-Holstein, had "obtained access to the Baltic." He ignored the trifling fact that there is, and that there has been for ever so long, a German seaboard from Holstein up to the Russian frontier about the length of the whole east coast of England; and that Kiel was a German harbor even before the Schleswig-Holstein war. The same writer politely speaks of the German nation which freed the German population of Schleswig-Holstein from a foreign yoke, as "a confederacy of political brigands." It is nothing to him that those Elbe Duchies possessed an ancient con-

stitution which kept them politically as separate from Denmark as is Hungary from Austria. According to that constitution, the common ruler was a king in Denmark, but only a duke in Schleswig-Holstein; his house ceasing to be entitled to the throne in the Duchies if no male issue of a king was existent. That case arose in 1863, even as a similar case arose between England and Hanover in 1837. To the writer alluded to, it is nothing either that the German people of Schleswig-Holstein had risen in arms themselves in 1848 for the defence of their constitutional rights, and had carried on a war for several years, only to be betrayed in the end by worthless German princes. It is nothing to him that in 1863 the German nation at last forced the unwilling courts of Berlin and Vienna into action, for the purpose of delivering their "forsaken brethren" from the foreign yoke.

In spite of all these clear facts, Schleswig-Holstein must be used as a theme for inflaming anew the minds of ignorant men in England, who are made to believe that the real object of Prussia was finally to establish her own "supremacy at sea." Lest this should not be enough, the old fabrication of an alleged plan of Germany to conquer Holland is once more set afloat. To cap the confused array of baseless charges, it is asserted that, since Bismarck's ministry, German policy had been directed to the acquisition of a seaboard. This is stated in forgetfulness of the fact that, until 1866, when nearly one-third of the territory and the population of Germany was ousted by what Prince Bismarck called himself in later years "a fratricidal war," Germany had not only a large seaboard in the Baltic and in the North Sea, but even a maritime footing in the Adriatic. There, Trieste, which centuries before had willingly joined herself to the Austrian part of Germany, was, until 1866, as much German as Liverpool, Glasgow, Cork are British.

VIII.

Any one looking at the subject with an unbiased mind, will see that the naval preparations of Germany are made for defence, not for attack; for the protection of her own coasts and colonies. Naturally, she has a special interest in the German Ocean (so-called since the days of the old Greek geographer Ptolemy, in the third century of our era), even as England has a special interest in the English Channel (so-called, though France has also a seaboard on her side of that waterway). Through the German Ocean

a French fleet would come in case of war. What is more natural than that Germany should possess a corresponding strength in that quarter, so as to have command of that sea against invasion? But, as has been said before, invasion may some day be attempted from the west and from the northeast simultaneously. On this subject, the former German Minister of War, Gen. Verdy du Vernois (of French-Huguenot descent, as his name indicates) and Lt.-Gen. von der Goltz, known for his works on the war of 1870-71, have strongly expressed their views. Gen. Verdy du Vernois lays stress on the difficulties Germany experienced in the war against Denmark in consequence of the lack of a navy. He also states that in the beginning of the war with France, Germany was, for the same reason, compelled to detach not less than 70,000 landwehr and 90,000 garrison and reserve troops—together 160,000 men—for the defence of her coasts and harbors, although the French navy was at that time not nearly so large nor so well prepared as it is now. The same military authority points out the enormous risks which the German army and population would run in reference to provisioning, if, in any future war, the North Sea, into whose vast corner bay a mass of imports converges, were not properly protected by a strong naval force. He, therefore, advised Germany, some years ago, to make up as quickly as possible for what her governments had so long neglected.

On the possibility of a war in which Germany would have to fight on two fronts, Gen. von der Goltz declares for the necessity of having a proper naval force both in the Baltic and in the German Ocean. He says:

“The bombardment and ransoming of our ports might, perhaps, exercise no great weight in the balance of the fortune of war. Still, by frequent repetition, and if no means of defence were found, such procedures of the enemy would in the long run act in a depressing way on the feelings of the country. Now, in war, very much depends upon a firm belief of the masses in a coming victory. It stands to reason that the task of our army, struggling on the eastern side, would be exceedingly facilitated by our naval mastery in the Baltic. The Commander-in-chief of that army would possess a far more extended freedom of action if he could choose any place on the coast as a basis for his enterprises, and if, in case he had to go out of the way before superior forces, he were not compelled under such circumstances to turn to the Vistula. The possession of Koenigsberg and of the western Samland, which is easily maintained from there, would serve as a lasting menace for the right wing of a Russian army of invasion. All this would be impossible if hostile

squadrons were to appear on our coasts and to maintain themselves there. Consequently our operations on land would be directly favored and forwarded by a strong fleet. A war against an allied France and Russia, therefore, renders it necessary for us to have a fleet which at least would be superior to a single one of those two antagonists."

Gen. von der Goltz concludes with these words: "Weakness invites attacks from the more powerful. Our present weakness at sea involves serious danger of war. In strengthening ourselves, we strengthen peace."

Is it not England's true interest, political and commercial, to see peace maintained? And has not the very strength of Germany on land hitherto prevented France, in spite of the incessant agitations of men of the Boulanger type, and of the type, even, of her present War and Marine Ministers, from embarking in an enterprise of "revenge," which, however it would turn out on the field of battle, would be fatal to the continued existence of the Republic? Victorious, a successful general would become master and Dictator of the commonwealth, and we know what that means in France. Defeated, as is far more likely, an infuriated population would take its revenge, as is usual at Paris, upon the unsuccessful government, overthrow the constitution, and once more relapse into a monarchical régime. Truly the strength of Germany is both a guarantee of peace and a help to the internal progress of the French Republic, and this, in the end, is for the good of Europe at large.

Unfortunately, all nations are now engaged in the increasing augmentation of their armaments on land and at sea. In that respect, the times are thoroughly out of joint. Even the United States of America, though not in danger of being attacked, has just found it desirable to increase its military and naval forces. Is Germany, closely pressed upon by two great military and naval Powers, is Germany to be accused because she takes that perilous position into account?

Let it be remembered that Englishmen and Germans, men of the same race, have never stood in battle array against each other, but have been repeatedly shoulder to shoulder in resisting aggressive despotism, and that the time may come when England herself may be only too glad to have in Germany a well-prepared friend, able to help in warding off a danger common to both.

KARL BLIND.